

# Dragon Newsletter



*January 31, 2006 Edition*

## Welcome to 2006...From the Soldiers of 1-4 Aviation!

Dear Dragon Families and Friends,

This is a difficult newsletter to write, but I would be remiss if I did not start off by addressing the profound losses that the battalion has suffered since my last letter to you. As most of you know, we have lost four pilots since our arrival at Camp Taji. CW4 Matt Salter and CW2 Isaias Santos died as the result of a crash on December 26, 2005. Then, on January 16, 2006, we lost CW3 Rex Kenyon and CW2 Ruel Garcia when their aircraft was shot down near Taji. I know that many of you gave support to the Salter, Santos, Kenyon, and Garcia families during this difficult time. I ask that you continue to do so, just as we continue to support each other over here.

Despite these losses, the Soldiers must still remain focused on what we came here to do. I can tell you that they work very hard every day, and that it makes me extremely proud to be their commander. The battalion has flown over 1600 hours since we took the mission over—several times the amount of flying that we do at Fort Hood. In addition, there are many people responsible for keeping these aircraft in the air so they can go out and support our ground troops. Crew chiefs must constantly maintain aircraft in order for pilots to fly those hours, our fuelers must pump fuel, medics must take care of sick Soldiers, the radio and internet communication systems must keep functioning, the tactical operations center must control the mission, and our mechanics must keep those vehicles and equipment running. Every Soldier here has a role and a purpose, and we need each of them to do the job they are trained to do, no matter how big or small.

The Soldiers do have some down time to relax and unwind. During those off-hours, the Soldiers stay occupied with a variety

of activities. Several of our Soldiers participate in Poetry Night, Choir, Salsa Night, or other MWR activities like ping-pong and Foosball. Many Soldiers enjoy using that time to work out at the gym, and they are looking forward to the shipment of new exercise equipment that will finish off the improvements to “Average Joe’s,” the battalion gym. And then possibly the most popular thing for Soldiers to do is staying in touch with friends and family through letters, phone calls, videoteleconferences,

and email. Believe it or not, we enjoy hearing all those everyday stories that remind us of life back home. Keep the news coming, it is truly the highlight of the day!

I hope that you all were able to enjoy the holidays with family and friends and that the New Year finds you happy and healthy. Even with all the work going on, the Soldiers still made time to celebrate the holidays. On Christmas Day, each company had an Open House time in the battalion lounge area, where we shared snacks beside the Christmas tree, listened to holiday music, and watched “Elf” on DVD. Other Sol-

diers rang in the New Year by having “near-beer” and cookouts on small charcoal grills. Delta Company even had a full-sized Christmas tree in their hangar!

Above all, the holidays made us think about how much our families and friends mean to us, and we thank you every day for all the love and support you provide us with so we can continue to do our jobs on a daily basis. From all of us here in the Dragon Battalion, best wishes for a happy, healthy New Year.

LTC Mike Rapavi  
Dragon 06



**From left to right: CPT Papaleo, CW2 Riddle, 1LT Shouse, and CW2 Vaughn, after dinner on Christmas Day, 2005.**



# Alpha Company “Vipers”

## Greetings from Viper 06!

Happy New Year!! It's hard to believe that two months have already passed since the Vipers bid farewell to our friends and families. The holidays are finally behind us. For most, Christmas was spent either working or sleeping. The busy schedule did not slow down even for Santa's visit, and I guess he noticed because outside every Viper's door on Christmas morning was a lump of coal (we're still not sure who did it.) The company did get together on Christmas night to promote CW2 Larabee and toast Christmas with a glass of Sparkling Grape Juice. We also passed out the wonderful stockings the FRG made for us. Everyone loved them and, we were very touched at the amount of work that obviously went into making them.

The following day, however tragedy struck the when CW4 Matt Salter and CW2 Isaias Santos were lost in an aircraft accident. While the loss was felt by everyone, many in the company took the loss of Matt very hard.

All of us here really appreciate the efforts of the FRG in supporting Janet in her time of need. Matt was and always will be a Viper in our hearts and his friendship, mentorship, loyalty, and strange sense of humor will be sorely missed by all. Our thoughts and prayers go out to both pilots' families.

Most in the company celebrated New Years much like they celebrated Christmas—by working! When the clock did strike midnight on New Years Eve, a few souls braved the cold to toast the New Year with beer (non-alcoholic, of course) and cigars. 1LT Seiver had radio watch that night and thus was forced to celebrate on his own, but did not miss out on an opportunity to toast with near-beer.

Everyone has continued to make improvements to their living spaces. CW2 Albrecht has become the internet service provider to many in the company. In addition, 1LT Seiver perfected the art of “Dumpster Diving” and actually managed to retrieve some rather valuable items that were

on their way to the local landfill. He generously shared his spoils with the rest of the company, to include a stereo and DVD player. His efforts were unparalleled by anyone else in the battalion. SPC Martinez has quickly become the most popular guy in the company since being appointed the company mail clerk.

But like I said, the operational tempo here does not slow and everyone is working long hours every day of the week. To help ease the work load, the Vipers were happy to welcome three new Crew Chiefs to the company: SPC David Zwadzich, SPC Brian Fisk, and PFC Ross Montano. We are very lucky to have these fine soldiers join us and we welcome their families to the Viper Family. Well, that should be all for now. Thanks again for all of your support for all the Soldiers of A Company. It means a tremendous amount to all of us. So, until next month.....

“ATTACK” CPT Timothy Measner



1LT Seiver and CW3 Boren catch some shade under an Apache.



Flying always puts a smile on CW3 Rubianes' face.



# Bravo Company "Raptors"



We have arrived.

More than 38 days after the first Raptors departed Fort Hood, the Company closed on Camp Taji. As canopy doors swung open and the last rotor blades came to rest, Bravo Company crew chiefs who preceded the movement by both ground and air, clambered up to the aircraft, chocked the wheels and welcomed their pilots. As we shouldered our gear and walked off the flight line, 3-3 pilots and crew chiefs, sitting on large cement barriers slapped each other on the back and lit cigars in celebration of their replacements' arrival. Bravo Company too had a reason to celebrate; for the first time in 15 days, the team was back together, and it was time to settle in and get to work.

Camp Taji is expansive in nature. It appears to be a small city from the air. The Company has made home of a group of trailers nestled into one end of the Battalion's footprint. Our cluster of trailers, or our "POD" as it is known here, has become our home away from home.

The resourcefulness of the Company's soldiers was immediately seen as rooms were quickly filled with cheaply purchased items such as refrigerators from Soldiers returning to the states. SGT Kennedy won the home improvement award building a loft and desk out of scrap wood that he found. Each soldier has personalized their space, completing it with photos and keep-

sakes from home which remind us of why we are here.

The company hit the ground running. The Killer Spades, the company that we replaced, had an outstanding program in place designed to orient us on the area that we would be operating in as well as the mission we would be undertaking. Each pilot had the opportunity to fly alongside the seasoned veterans and ask questions while our crew chiefs adjusted well to an amazing pace, launching flight after flight. After a week of orientation, the cord was cut and the Raptors assumed the fight. Bravo Company immediately made an impact and has flown hundreds of hours and assisted ground forces in a vast array of missions.

As we continue to settle in, we will continue to learn. As we continue to learn we will make an even greater impact on what has become the focus of our nation's efforts. And we will make a difference for the future of Iraq and place our mark on history.

The Company has grown since its departure from Fort Hood. SPC Layfield, a hard charging crew chief, has joined us from Delta Company. SPC Layfield is married to Mrs. Jennifer Layfield of Illinois. We are happy to welcome them to the Raptor Family.

Lastly, as we celebrated the holiday season, our hearts and minds were home with our loved ones. We are all looking forward to the New Year, to accomplishing our mission and our goals and to com-

**Newly promoted CW3 Mike Niemi shakes hands with CW3 Troy Snook on January 1, 2006.**



**B Company loves getting mail....especially all those care packages!**

ing home to you.

CPT Jeffrey M. Papaleo



# Charlie Company "Sidewinders"

## SIDEWINDERS NEWSLETTER

It's been another exciting month for the Sidewinders. January has been cool and rainy but despite the weather, we're continuing to launch aircraft and fly missions at an impressive rate. Although I can't discuss specifics, rest assured that Charlie Company, as well as the rest of the battalion, has contributed a great deal to the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division's efforts of putting a sizeable dent in the population of bad guys in and around Baghdad!

By far, the best news this month has been the re-enlistment of three exceptional Soldiers:

Sergeant First Class Juan Sanchez  
Sergeant Brandin Ross  
Corporal Ruth Serna

It is no exaggeration to say that these are three of the very finest Soldiers in the Battalion. We are very fortunate to have

In other news, some of our Soldiers have already begun taking their 15 days of morale leave. 1SG Hampton and PFC Jernigan are already back in the States.

Although we're unable to forecast the exact numbers, we may expect to send roughly a few Soldiers on leave each month. Although it is impossible to predict the exact dates, check with your Sidewinder to get a rough idea of when he or she will be home.

Thanks for all of your support!!

Very Respectfully,

Mark A. Greene  
"Sidewinder 06"  
Captain, US Army  
Commanding



**C Company maintenance test pilot, CW2 Fitzgerald.**



**SGT Ross hauls a new mattress back to his room. He is one of many Soldiers who have received new mattresses since arriving at Taji.**



**C Company crew chief SPC Bramblett uses his welding skills to repair the battalion's basketball hoop.**





## Delta Company "Dawgs"

Greetings from Taji and Happy New Year. I sincerely hope that the New Year is bringing happiness and health to all of you. For the most part Christmas and New Years was just another day, but we did take a moment to open small gifts and eat some homemade treats sent by all of you. I assure you that your Soldiers are staying busy as we have assumed the full mission..

The Dawgs have settled into the routine here and are making us all proud. As much as the battalion is flying, there is plenty of maintenance to conduct and that keeps all of the platoons fully engaged and very busy. Being busy is appreciated because the time goes by quickly.

We will be sending several of the Dawgs on leave in January followed by more in the coming months. Every Soldier will be afforded the opportunity to take leave during our time here and we will cease the leave program sometime in early September.

The Dawgs have already distinguished themselves as a first-class organization. Their professionalism, dedication and hard work has set them apart and distinguished them within the Brigade. They make us proud every day. The shops platoon has already completed numerous jobs in areas that they rarely get to experience. Because the aircraft are flying so much, they break more often and the Dawgs are getting some valuable experience. I think CPL Guffey is earning his deployment money keeping all of these engines running!

tensive. It requires a lot of armament attention in combat because all of those systems must work to meet mission. SFC



**CPT James and 1SG Belle in an M1114 up-armored vehicle.**



**Shops platoon Soldiers enjoying some goodies from a care package. From left to right: PFC Powell, PFC Weillert, SPC Triplett, SSG Osburn, SFC Omari.**

Armament has a very large influence on our overall mission success. They are performing well, overcoming challenges and working day and night on this aircraft that is truly armament maintenance in-

Lyter and his team are managing their assets well to make it all happen. They welcome the return of SSG Domingo, who just returned from months of vacation at BNCOC.

Maintenance is busy conducting various scheduled and unscheduled maintenance tasks. They are getting some valuable experience as well, as the junior Soldiers are seeing a lot of "good" maintenance. SGT Mathes is ensuring that all of the Soldiers, including me, are lifting weights on the bench they have in their work area. Of course we have an unofficial bench press competition going between all of us. I think PFC Guerra is leading the way, so we all have some work to do.

The QC shop will be relocating to a new area closer to the line companies so we can make their operation more efficient, which will ensure we keep aircraft in the fight. The PC shop welcomes back CW4 Pfleger, who took a three week (con't)



## Delta Company "Dawgs" (cont'd)



**From left to right: (unidentified), 1LT Bennett, SGT Whitaker.**

vacation down south to recover from surgery conducted here in theater. We are glad he is healthy and back with us here at Taji.

In the orderly room with the 1SG, I am impressed with the work of SPC Walker, who handles all of the administrative work and is really doing a fantastic job. We are also pleased to have CPL Rodriguez who has been a welcome addition to the team. Congratulations to him on his recent re-enlistment.

As you may have heard through the Family Readiness Group (FRG), we have the capability to conduct video teleconferencing (VTC) with our family members in the Killeen area. They are occurring weekly, so have your Soldier sign up and you will be able to talk with them and see them at the same time. It is a great facility and provides an excellent opportunity to stay in touch. You can also contact the FRG for more information.

Every month I intend to make note of the "Hero of the Battle" for that month. Every day I notice Soldiers doing excellent work in support of this mission. The intent is to recognize one Soldier each month that has consistently gone above and beyond to ensure mission success and positioned himself/herself as a leader.

This month I would like to recognize SPC Barraza from the armament platoon. SPC Barraza has distinguished himself early in this deployment by conducting accurate and aggressive troubleshooting of aircraft to ensure they are returned to duty as soon as possible. His knowledge of the sights and weapons has assisted him in his success and he is a leader among his peers. Keep up the good work!

The 1SG and I appreciate all of the support from spouses and family members alike. We know that your job is just as difficult as ours, although different. We all think of you often and are looking forward to our opportunity to take leave. Keep us in your thoughts and prayers and the Dawgs will continue to make all of us proud.

CPT Corey M.. James Dawg 06



**D Company showed their Christmas spirit with a big tree in their hangar.**



# Echo Company "Rough Riders"

## Greetings from Roughrider 5!

Hello from Camp Taji, Iraq. Now that the Christmas trees are put up and the lights have come down, we are off to a great start in 2006. Missions continue and all of our soldiers are hard at work.

All of the packages we have been receiving from you have been great during this holiday season. It is wonderful to see the Soldiers' faces when they get mail or a care package.

The Maintenance Platoon recently received a thumbs-up from Brigade Commander, COL MacWillie. The Brigade Commander also added that our Maintenance Platoon ranks first among all battalions in the Combat Aviation Brigade. The Soldiers in the platoon have been working hard at bringing all of the ground equipment to a fully mission capable status.

The Distribution Platoon has had a busy start. Already this group has fueled over 900 aircraft with well over 200,000 gallons of aviation grade fuel. 1LT Aguon heads up the team in Baghdad, while

SFC Lopez carries the load in Taji. Without these Soldiers providing excellent fuel and ammunition services, the aircraft of the central Iraq area would be at a stand still.

All the Soldiers of the Company have been taking on new jobs and tasks all around Camp Taji. Whether they are pulling guard shifts or escorting local nationals on and around the base, they do their job with distinction.

We hope the New Year has been great so far, and look forward to the great opportunity we have in helping mold this nation's rebirth.

1LT Jonathan Perrone



**PFC El Far stands tall atop a vehicle in Camp Buehring, Kuwait.**



**Soldiers from the E Company team stationed at Baghdad International Airport, working hard to keep aircraft refueled and in the fight.**

**TOP ROW: CPL Handy, PFC Riccardo, SSG Lopez, PV2 Marquez, PV2 Caldwell, SPC Moran, PFC Gilmore, PFC Hannaman, PFC Simmons, PFC Lee, PFC Dolgach, (unidentified), PFC Seaberry, SPC Ambelas, PFC Alardin.**

**BOTTOM ROW: SGT Killsfirst, SFC Lopez, SGT Square, CPL Reeder, 1LT Aguon, PFC Casteneda.**

# HHC "Stallions"

## Greetings Stallion Family and Friends,

Your Soldiers are doing great work over here in Iraq. Although the days are long and the work is hard, the time is flying by. All the demanding training that the Stallions participated in prior to deploying is paying off. The unit has assumed the mission and we are in full swing. Your Soldiers are conducting the mission that they were trained to do, and are doing it well.

The FRG is doing a wonderful job keeping the "home fires burning". It is easy to focus on the task at hand with your continued support back home. We appreciate all the letters and boxes from family and friends. Each letter or package that we receive reminds us of home. They also serve as a constant reminder that

we are loved and respected by many. Keep up the good work.

Both the 1SG and I would like to say how proud we are of the men and women in this unit. These Soldiers are truly making history. We thought that we would take the opportunity to share with you some of the Stallions you know as friends or relatives:

"Shoot, Move and Communicate" is the motto of the Signal Corps and that is exactly what the 1-4 ARB Commo Shop has been doing since we arrived in theater. Whether installing FM radio communications, configuring digital systems or troubleshooting complex networking issues, the Soldiers of our "Commo shop" are on the scene.

As briefly mentioned last month, the 1-4 ARB Commo Shop hit the ground running. The Commo Shop had a limited time to establish, and validate all mission essential communications equipment for the entire battalion. Without fail, the Commo Soldiers of 1-4 ARB jumped into action. SPC Khaliah Baham and PFC Nicholas Rawlings spearheaded the installation and validation of our newly fielded Battalion Command Post Node. While SGT Dameon Vassar and SPC Eric Baksin honed their technical skills to ensure our vehicular digital systems were ready to fight. Within a matter of five days, their hard work coupled with a lot of elbow grease enabled our Commo shop to be the first S6 section in the entire Brigade to establish and validate all digital communication systems.



**Commo Shop Soldiers.** Back row: SSG Washington, SPC Baham, CPT Hanson, SGT Vassar. Front row: PFC Hines, PFC Rawlings, SPC Baksin.

## *In the Eyes of Our Soldiers*

*We are called to lead. By accepting this calling, we choose to deny self and to serve our soldiers. Some push themselves ever higher at the expense of all around them. They think of self first and always. We must not. Others, with thumb to chest, brag about what "I" have done. We must not. Some worry about how their decisions will make them look. We must worry about how our decisions will affect our soldiers and the mission. Others may be publicly praised and validated with medals and awards. We may do the hard work and watch as others take credit for it. "Where is our validation?" you ask. It is in the eyes of our soldiers. It is there that we are counted worthy to be called leader.*





## HHC "Stallions" (cont'd)

HHC is fortunate to have several dedicated junior leaders. One young leader who epitomizes selfless leadership is SGT Arthur Audet, a 15P assigned to the S3 section. On January 5, 2006 SGT Audet re-enlisted for six years, receiving a healthy bonus in the process. It is fitting that the first HHC STALLION to re-enlist for 2006 be SGT Audet. SGT Audet is a very capable and dependable NCO. He performs at a level above his current rank and is a true asset to this unit. His decision to re-enlist ensures that the Army will have several years to benefit from the experiences of this fine NCO. His dedication to the Army is appreciated by all. He also plans on sharing his bonus with his commander, which is always a plus.

SPC Vincent P. Lizama is another junior 15P that will leave his mark on Army Aviation. SPC Lizama works in the HHC orderly room and

is the commander's driver. SPC Lizama's daily activities include such things as processing and preparing all personnel and legal actions for the company. He answers to the call sign Stallion 06D, and keeps the commanders vehicle in fighting shape and ready to convoy. As

proven on the ground assault convoy from Kuwait to Iraq last month. SPC Lizama has his hands full ensuring



SPC Lizama, hard at work in the HHC Orderly Room.

and father to Sonya, Vincent, Sierra and Skyler. He looks forward to spending time with the family upon redeployment.



CPT Needum and SGT Audet during his January reenlistment ceremony.

These Stallions are truly making a difference here in Iraq. We are honored to be associated with such a remarkable unit. We would also like to once again thank the Rear Detachment and Family Readiness Groups for their untiring support throughout this deployment. We could not do this without you! **STALLIONS ATTACK!!**

### January Birthdays:

SFC Bass, SFC Brathwaite, CPT Celis, SPC Joe, CPT Needum, CW2 Pressley, LTC Rapavi, SGT Saldana, and SPC Sneed

**CPT Byron C. Needum**  
**Stallion 06**  
**1SG Kenneth W. Bolden**  
**Stallion 07**

# Dragon Photo Corner



E Co Soldiers filling their magazines with ammunition.



ISG Hampton with his C Co Yard of the Month award.



1LT Frazier and 1LT Sidwell (center), plot an escape from their meeting, while CPT Hanson and CPT Salvo look on.



A Co Soldiers CW2 Sharpe, SGT Garcia, and SPC Bender, at the Udairi port in late November.



CPT Ritch reenlisting SPC Ambelas from E Co, in Baghdad.



SPC Kenney and SGT Trammel get muddy during rainy season.



# Dragon Photo Corner



SPC Delacruz, PFC Guerra, and SSG Osburn take a look at a broken Apache windscreen.



E Co Soldiers PFC Casteneda, SPC Lee, and SPC Becerra.



SPC Sneed tries his hand at driving a tractor.



CPT Hanson and ILT Davis hanging out in the commo shop.



C Co Soldiers enjoying 1SG Hampton's "yard."



A view of one of Saddam's palaces, taken by a B Co pilot.



# Dragon Photo Corner



ISG Arnett and CPT Celis in the battalion conference room.



CW3 Niemi from B Co in action.



CPT Needum, SPC Lizama, SPC Ceja, and SGT Vassar on their December convoy to Iraq.



SGT Killsfirst being reenlisted by LTC Rapavi.



The dining hall with its holiday decorations.....



.....complete with gingerbread houses and other displays.



# Dragon Photo Corner



PFC Casteneda from E Co refueling an aircraft at Baghdad International Airport.



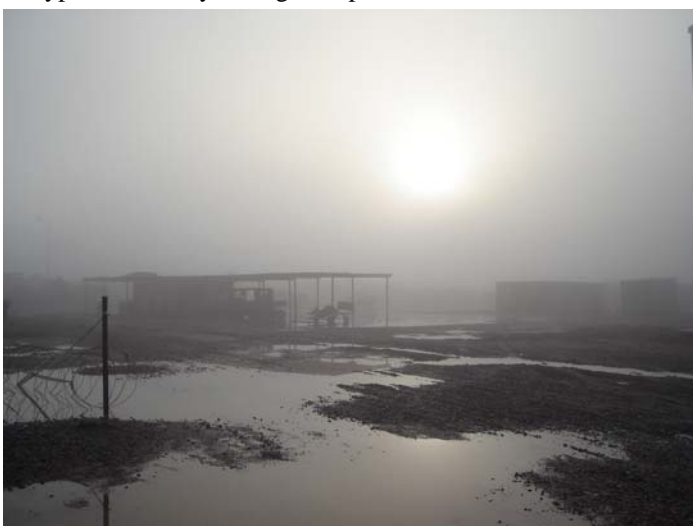
A Co pilots CW2 Fuller and CW2 Swetz.



A typical walkway through the pods, where we live.



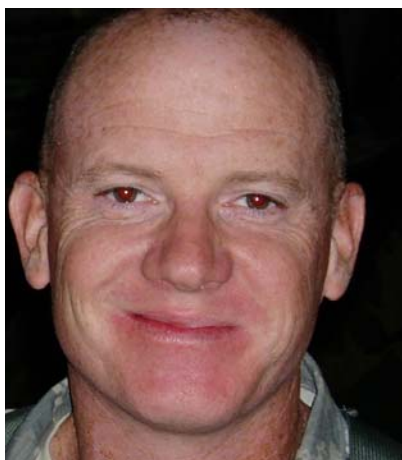
Each Soldier's room has a bed and basic furniture.



Early morning fog is a common sight this time of year.



D Company's 1SG Belle and Chaplain Hernandez.



CW4 Matt Salter



CW2 Isaias Santos



CW3 Rex Kenyon



CW2 Ruel Garcia

## *In Memory of the Pilots of 1-4 Aviation*

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